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Wireless Telephone Service Becomes Essential Communication Tool In Rural Areas

Survey finds that consumers are using wireless service more and landline service less

(DATELINE) – February XX, 2003 – A study conducted by Western Wats, a leading independent research organization in Provo, Utah, found that people living in rural areas are more likely to use wireless phones than ever before. In addition, Western Wireless, the largest independent rural wireless service provider in the United States and owner of Cellular One brand, has observed that its customers are using about three times more minutes per month than they did just four years ago.

The survey, which was conducted in counties with population densities averaging eight people per square mile, indicated that respondents have not increased the number of phone lines in their home over the past two years, but there was a 34 percent increase in the number of wireless phones during that same period.

"Wireless technology has become an essential form of communications across America, and consumer demand continues to be strong. We are seeing this especially in rural areas where landline telephone companies are offering significantly smaller local calling areas and wireless rate plans have become more affordable and competitive," said Mikal Thomsen, president of Western Wireless Corporation. "More and more, Western Wireless is seeing itself competing directly with local telephone companies, as consumers are utilizing wireless service for a significant amount of their telephone calls, and in many cases all of their telecommunications needs."

The survey found that of the rural consumers who had wireless service:

- One-half stated that their wireless phone has become more important to them and their landline phone has become less important;
- Fifty-one percent said wireless service has replaced some or a large percentage of their home landline service;
- Forty-eight percent reported that wireless service has replaced 90 percent or more of their landline long distance;

- Nearly a quarter reported that they consider their wireless phone to be their primary phone; and
- Two-thirds reported that they have friends or family members who they contact primarily on their wireless phone.

The survey also indicated that consumer demand is strong for wireless service in rural areas. Of the people who do not have wireless service, 50 percent plan to purchase a wireless phone in the next six months, and they ranked “safety” as their top reason, and “convenience” as their next reason.

Western Wireless was the first wireless company to bring advanced digital technology and IXRTT data services to rural areas. The challenge to bringing urban-style service to rural America is that a single cell site serves 1,000 potential customers in rural America, whereas the same cell site investment would serve 50,000 in an urban area. Despite not providing service to any top 100 markets, which have lower costs to build and maintain service, Western Wireless is competing with the largest wireless companies in America and the smallest local telephone companies by providing rural consumers competitive pricing and comprehensive coverage.

The Federal Communications Commission makes universal service support available to wireless and wireline communications companies to provide telephone service in sparsely-populated areas. Western Wireless is both a contributor to and a recipient of that fund, and uses universal service funds to provide and enhance its service in rural regions.

“The hundreds of millions of dollars Western Wireless has invested, over and above any monies received from the universal service fund, enables wireless communications to continue to advance in rural America. We are excited about meeting consumers’ expectations of quality and coverage that rivals urban areas,” said Thomsen.

About Cellular One

Western Wireless Corporation operates under the Cellular One name and is a leading provider of rural communications in the Western United States. The company owns and operates wireless cellular phone systems marketed under the Cellular One national brand name in 19 western states. Western Wireless provides service to more than a million customers. For more information about Western Wireless, visit www.wwireless.com.

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